

LOWELL

(A Game of Resistance)

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Concept: This game is meant to be a simulation of what Labor Unions do to create a strike. Players will get a brief history of the Lowell Mill Girls Strike and an explanation of work conditions around the world today. Players will have one hour to deliver a list of 3, 5, 6 demands (depending on player count) to management that must be met or the girls will strike. They also need to create Strike Materials (posters, slogans, songs, brochures) to convince the public to support their strike.

Players: 5, 10, 15

Facilitator: 1-3

Time to Play: 40 minutes to 1 Hour (For Schools, Preparation for the game should be done the class period before).

Needed to play: Characters, Reasons and Reticence Worksheets, LED Candles around the room, a dimly lit room, A bag to mix up Reasons and Reticence. Poker Chips, Paper, Posterboard, Markers

Trigger Warnings: Workplace Harassment, Dangerous Workplace Conditions, Suicide
State of Play:

The GM will hand out the game introduction for the players to read. It sets the tone of the game. Gameplay is a consent based roleplay of the workers of the mill to determine what concerns are important to bring to management. In this game, players will be in low candlelight or low light to mimic conditions of workers around the world who are subjugated by management. This can be adjusted for those people who are visually impaired, or those uncomfortable with darkness. GMs should remind the players that while the goal of the game is create a Union and Strike Materials to strike against management, real life does not necessarily always come out with the desired results. Sometimes people don't join. Sometimes the strike process falters.

The **Reason/Reticence/ Lowell Mill Token** mechanic is to prevent people from just getting along. No strike is without people who just can't join for whatever personal reason that holds them back. Some people's needs will be sacrificed for the good of the whole. Those people who are not heard will sometimes be convinced and sometimes not. Players should be encouraged to listen to the argument and determine whether they are convinced by the person.

Denouement: After the game, the GM should encourage the players to write what they feel happened in the strike and then to share with the group what they wrote. After they finished, the GM shall read this snippet:

"Just remember, the Lowell Mill Strike was the first strike in American history, but they did not succeed. Their wages were cut. However, two years later when the company charged a "rent hike" on their living arrangements, the women turned out twice the number and succeeded in getting management to rescind the rent hike. We should remember what they did as an inspiration to all those workers who are oppressed throughout the world."

Game Introduction

The first strike in the United States took place in Lowell Massachusetts by women of the Lowell Textile Factory in the 1830s. Most of the women lived in factory housing on site and sent their wages home to provide for family members. 6 women lived to a room and the close quarters fostered resentment but it also fostered a community of people who worked together to ensure life was bearable for the ladies who worked in the mills. At the mills, ladies read extensively and often tacked up poems on the looms to memorize which led to an intellectual reasoning and education that most girls of the time period did not get. It is because of this education, the women of Lowell looked to organize together when management decided to cut their wages by 15%. So that night, by candlelight, they worked together to create materials to Strike against the Lowell Mill Works.

While this happened in the 1830s, labor is still oppressed throughout the world. From the company Foxconn in China which has conditions eerily similar to those the mill girls suffered under, to sweatshops throughout the world, workers are given many reasons to ask for better working conditions. In this game, you will take the part of a worker in one of these shops throughout the world in the 21st Century. You will be doing this by candlelight like many of these people in other places of the world have to do. You will be asked to complete the following sheet and by the end of the game you should be able to feel what the Women of Lowell and the people around the world who suffer these conditions today have to deal with every year.

Rules of the Game:

Your facilitator will hand out a reason to join the strike and a Reticence that holds you back from striking. Make up a story for each that fits the narrative.

You will have one hour to create a Statement of what your strike asks of management and create a poster and a brochure that will inform the public who watch your strike what you are about. Catch slogans or protest chants are a bonus.

You must create a Statement of your strike that includes three reasons of the group of players. Two people's reasons may be left out of the decision making. In doing this, those who have Reticence in speaking out may choose not to participate in the strike. A strike only functions well if all people join in, if there are workers who don't submit, they may decide to cause issues for the workers striking. It is important to try to get people on board.

Lowell Mill Tokens: You have been handed a poker chip. This poker chip is a Token of your workplace. It represents, food, time-off, assistance at a later date for the worker. If a player's Reticence is preventing them from joining the strike, another player can hand over the Lowell Mill Token and say "Tell me your story and I can help you" At this point the opposing player will reveal the story of their Reticence. After the Reticence is revealed, the player who handed the token may attempt to persuade the person to join the strike by alleviating their fears. If the player who received the token feels the argument is sufficient they will accept the coin. If not, they will turn it back to the player and politely explain why they won't join the strike. The player who offered their coin should turn it over to the facilitator and cannot use it again.

At the end of the hour, you may have people who will not join your strike. That is perfectly acceptable, and all players will write what they did in the aftermath of the strike. Be creative as to what happened to your character.

Character Sheet

You are playing the character of a worker at a manufacturing plant. Please give us your name.

NAME: _____

Before you begin, with your group decide the following; Name of the company, what you make, where in the world are you?

_____, _____, _____

What is the reason that you've chosen to strike (handed to you by the facilitator)?

Reason: _____

Make up a story that fleshes out your reasoning. Make it personal for you.

What is the Reticence you have for striking (handed to you by the facilitator)?

Reticence: _____

Make up a story that explains your Reticence. Make it personal for you.

What did you do during the strike? (END GAME)

Reasons and Reticence

REASONS	RETICENCE
I have worked here for 12 years and my pay has not increased in 3 of those two years because of Rent Hikes at the Company.	I need this job to help my family. My sister has a major health condition.
I Was Severely Injured on the Job. It has caused me pain for years.	IF I leave, I will not be able to get another job because the manager will accuse me of being a “problem worker.”
I have worked in an area that requires safety equipment, but it’s so old and shoddy it’s more dangerous to use than wear.	I’m 59 years old, who will take me if I lose this job?
I have not had time off in 3 months. However I don’t get paid overtime because the factory keeps me “On Call” in the factory dorms.	My family members who also work here might suffer retribution.
My Manager has repeatedly made comments that make me uncomfortable and last week cornered me to agree to a date.	The company holds my savings in their “bank.” What if they don’t pay me what they owe me?
My friend committed suicide because of the living conditions of the employee housing.	What if they isolate me from all other workers and I have to live a solitary existence.
I have been sick for months and the company will not let me leave the compound to get adequate medical help.	What if they prevent me from ever getting “time off” to visit loved ones and family?